DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 215 555 FL 012 618

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TITLE A Study of Hiring Practices in Foreign Language Departments.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Faculty; Colleges; Departments; *Employment Practices; Higher Education; *Language Teachers; Native Speakers; *Personnel Management; Questionnaires; Surveys; Universities

ABSTRACT

A survey questionnaire designed to investigate hiring practices was mailed to 118 foreign language departments of U.S. colleges and universities that advertised fulltime teaching positions in the "Chronicle of Higher Education" from September 1979 to June 1980. Of the 85 returns, 69 responses met the requirements of the study and were used in the analyses. The results indicated that the degree specialities of the faculty hired often did not match their assigned teaching areas. Whereas three times more positions were in undergraduate language as compared to literature teaching, four out of every five newly hired faculty specialized in literature. Although the hiring of native vs. nonnative speakers appeared to be within the range of the estimated proportions, a closer look revealed that a substantial number of the new hirings in both large and small language divisions did not enhance proportionate representation of native and nonnative speakers. Finally, the qualifications and teaching assignments of hired native vs. nonnative speakers seemed to be comparable, with the exception that there was a tendency for positions at senior faculty rank to be filled by nonnative candidates. (Author)

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A Study of Hiring Practices in Foreign Language Departments

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A Study of Hiring Practices in Foreign Language Departments[1]

Foreign language educators have long recognized that declining enrollments call for major adjustments in foreign language programs. The Report to the President from the Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies commented on " . . . widespread expert agreement that the decline in foreign language enrollments is in large measure a response to poor instruction."[2] While many studies have been attempted with revised course offerings and new teaching methodologies, the question of staffing has not been fully explored. What are the qualifications and characteristics of the successful job seekers who obtain employment in foreign language departments of American colleges and universities? Are they trained in the areas needed to improve the "poor instruction" identified in the Commission's Report? Does their native or nonnative speaker status influence their employability more than their academic qualifications? Perhaps the answers to these questions would identify a partial explanation to the phenomenon of declining enrollment that continues to plague foreign language programs in this country.

The problem of declining enrollment at the college and university levels is frequently blamed on reduced university foreign language requirements. Quite frequently, as soon as students complete the obligatory courses, usually a two-year sequence on language acquisition, they are out the department door. However, despite the same reduced requirements, some foreign language departments report remarkable success in retaining students past the required sequence, especially those students who were enrolled in experimental language programs.[3] In addition

to the special curricula and materials featured in experimental programs, their teachers also possess special features which may offer us a clue to why these programs are often successful. Usually the teachers through their involvement in curriculum development become highly knowledgeable about second language acquisition theory and techniques . . . whereas in regular, non-experimental language programs, there is doubt if the teachers are trained in, or actively involved in learning about, second language acquisition. A survey study examining if the training of hired staff matches what they are required to teach would provide a valuable insight to this issue.

A second interesting question which may be raised regarding staffing in university foreign language departments is the role of native versus nonnative speakers, a semi-taboo topic usually discussed in low voices between good friends. Myths surrounding hiring preferences and preferential treatment abound with both native and nonnative speakers frequently complaining they are victims of tokenism or outright discrimination, and able to point to extreme staffing situations and personal experiences to prove their point.[4] It seems obvious that qualified teachers of both groups have distinct attributes to offer foreign language students, unique either to native or to nonnative speakers. Native speakers, besides providing a rich, indepth, personal understanding of the foreign language and culture, bring both to life for their students with their gestures, expressions, inflections--allowing their students classroom ethnographic experiences with the people whose language and culture they are studying.[5] On the other hand, nonnative speakers may readily interpret the target language and culture within the context of the student's own experience, and more importantly, may serve as role models of persons who have attempted and succeeded in the difficult goal of becoming fluent in the target language.[6] It seems that a

strong foreign language faculty should be composed of qualified teachers of both groups whose complementary skills and roles work together to enrich and motivate student learning.

The present study explores the two aspects of hiring practices in foreign language departments of American colleges and universities discussed above: the matching of academic degree specialities with teaching assignments, and preferences for native or nonnative speakers. The study addresses four specific questions: (1) Do foreign language departments hire faculty members with academic degree specialities in the area of their major teaching assignments? (2) Is the hiring of native or nonnative speakers proportionate to the availability of qualified personnel in both groups? (3) In individual foreign language departments, does the native or nonnative speaker status of newly hired faculty complement the existing faculty groups' native-nonnative composition to become more proportionate to the availability of qualified personnel in both groups? (Or in the case of smaller language divisions with two to four faculty, does the hiring promote equally balanced representation of native and nonnative speaker faculty?) (4) Are native and nonnative speakers who are hired equally qualified in terms of academic degree, are they hired at equal rank, and are they given comparable teaching assignments? The study investigates these questions in context of the commonly taught languages (French, German, and Spanish).

The term "native speaker" (NS) is understood to refer to those who learned the language as a first language (singly or in combination with another or other languages) through exposure to the spoken language usually on an informal basis.[7] "Nonnative speaker" (NNS) is one for whom the language is not acquired as a first language, but as a foreign language.

Description of the Survey

The population that was studied consisted of positions to begin fall 1980 in foreign language departments of American colleges and universities located in the United States, and were advertised in the Chronicle of Higher Education from September 4, 1979, through June 16, 1980.[8] The positions were full-time teaching positions for French, German, and/or Spanish language and literature courses with a rank of Instructor or above. Positions primarily administrative, or originating in departments other than the foreign language department (e.g., Education), were not included in the study.

In late August 1980, colleges and universities (plus their branches) advertising positions that met the criteria described above were mailed a letter presenting the need for the study and a questionnaire to complete concerning the outcome of the hiring decision. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions arranged in three sections, with each section focusing on a particular aspect of the hiring. The first group of questions concerned the advertised position itself (the language(s) to be taught; the position's faculty rank; the projected number of undergraduate language, undergraduate literature/civilization, or graduate courses to be taught; and whether the position had been filled). The second group of questions addressed the qualifications of the staff member hired, if the position had been filled (NS or NNS status; highest academic degree completed by September, 1980; and the employee's academic degree specialization). The questionnaire's third section surveyed the characteristics of the faculty group composing the language division within which the hiring took place (the number of NS and NNS faculty, and for each group, the number whose highest degree was the completed Ph.D., All-But-Dissertation status, or B.A. degree; and the total number of faculty with degree specialities in

literature, teaching of the foreign language, linguistics, or "other" areas). Unfortunately, due to ambiguites in the questionnaire's third section, the only information from this part that could be used in the study were data concerning the total number of NS and NNS faculty composing the language division.

In order to establish a baseline for comparing the NS-NNS hirings that took place with the availability of NS-NNS candidates, it was necessary to estimate the proportions of qualified NS-NNS potential applicants. To do this, the first and last names of those awarded the doctoral degree in French, Germanic, Hispanic, and Spanish Language and Literature in 1978-1979 were analyzed.[9] The proportions of NS doctoral degree recipients were thus estimated to be: French, 20%; German, 34%; and Spanish, 47%. These percentages were used to determine the answers to questions two and three of the study.

Response to the Survey

Eighty-five responses were received for 118 positions surveyed in 104 colleges and universities, a return rate of 72%. Of these 85 responses, six positions did not meet the criteria for the study,[10] 10 positions were not filled, and only 69 responses were used in the analysis.[11] Among the 69 responses, 21 of the positions were to teach French, ten were to teach German, 30 were to teach Spanish, and eight had dual language teaching assignments. Statistical tests revealed no significant differences in the response data for geographic regions and languages surveyed. It seems that the study provides a fairly representative picture of the hiring practices of American colleges and universities for teaching positions in the commonly taught languages beginning fall 1980.

Results: Answers to Questions

(1) Do foreign language departments in American colleges and universities hire faculty members with academic degree specialities in the area of their primary teaching assignments?

Excluding the eight positions with dual language assignments, for each of the other 61 responses, the degree speciality stated for the new faculty member was compared with the area in which the person would teach the greatest number of courses. If equal numbers of language and literature courses were to be taught by a faculty member, then the teaching area was categorized in the person's academic speciality area. The results reveal that primary teaching assignment does not depend upon degree speciality ($\chi^2 = 2.13$, $df = 1$, $p > 0.05$). Among the 46 new faculty who were assigned to teach primarily undergraduate language courses, only 11 (24%) held degree specialities in language as compared to 35 (76%) literature specialists. For the 15 teaching positions primarily in undergraduate literature/civilization or graduate courses, one (7%) faculty member held a degree speciality in language and 14 (93%) were trained in literature. Thus, most of the faculty hired for literature courses had training in literature; and for teaching positions primarily in undergraduate language courses, three times as many faculty were hired with literature specialities than with degree specialities in the area of their primary teaching assignments. It appears that there are three times more positions for language teaching (N = 46) than for literature teaching (N = 15), whereas there are four times more newly hired faculty specialized in literature (N = 49) as compared to that in language teaching (N = 12).

(2) Is the hiring of NS-NNS candidates in proportion to their availability?

The three foreign languages were combined as one for this analysis, and the eight dual language positions were not computed. The actual numbers of 27 NS (five French, five German, 13 Spanish) appear to be within the range that can be expected, according to the estimated proportions of NS-NNS candidates determined by the procedure described in the previous section ($\underline{X}^2 = 2.61$, $\underline{df} = 1$, $\underline{p} > 0.05$).

(3) In small foreign language divisions with two to four faculty members, do new hirings tend to bring NS-NNS representation toward numerical balance? In larger language divisions with five or more faculty, do new hirings promote proportionate NS-NNS balance in accordance with the availability of qualified NS-NNS personnel? [12]

The intent of these questions is to study the effect of new hirings in departments where circumstances in the past have created imbalance in the NS-NNS representation within a faculty group, or where the new hiring has the potential to create imbalance. The third section of the survey questionnaire provided 18 usable small faculty groups with two to four members and 29 large faculty groups with more than five members in the language divisions. The results show that in small language divisions, in seven of 18 (39%) such situations (two of the five NS hirings and five of 13 NNS hirings), the hiring promoted <u>imbalanced</u> NS-NNS representation.

Similarly, for the 29 language divisions with five or more faculty members in which the new hiring could create NS-NNS proportionate representation, as determined by the national baseline data, the responses for each of the three languages were analyzed according to whether a NS or NNS candidate was hired, and the effect of the hiring. Six of 14 NS hirings and four of 15 NNS hirings increased <u>disproportionate</u> representation, or ten of 29 (34%) hirings.

Thus the survey identifies 17 out of 45 hirings (38%) as maintaining or increasing disproportionate NS-NNS faculty composition, and ten out of 45 (22%) as having no effect. These results show that a substantial number of the new hirings in both large and small language divisions did not enhance proportionate representation of NS-NNS faculty in situations where the new hiring had this potential.

(4) Are qualifications and teaching conditions equal for NS and NNS candidates hired?

The 32 NS (46%) and 37 NNS (54%) faculty were compared in terms of their highest academic degree held, their appointed faculty rank, and their primary teaching assignment. The results indicate that first, NS and NNS faculty do not have unequal academic qualifications (χ^2 = .867, df = 1, $p > 0.05$). Of the 47 new faculty holding the completed Ph.D. degree, 20 (43%) were NS and 27 (57%) NNS faculty; of the 22 with All-But-Dissertation status or holding the M.S. or B.A. degree, 12 (54.5%) were NS and 10 (45.5%) NNS faculty.

Secondly, it appears that NS and NNS faculty are hired equally for teaching positions similar in content and level (χ^2 = .373, df = 1, $p > 0.05$). For the 54 teaching positions primarily of undergraduate language courses, 24 (44%) NS and 30 (56%) NNS candidates were hired; for the 15 positions primarily for undergraduate literature/civilization or graduate courses, 8 (53%) NS and 7 (47%) NNS candidates were hired.

Thirdly, the study indicates that there is a tendency for positions at senior faculty rank to be filled by NNS candidates (χ^2 = 2.713, df = 1, p = 0.10). Of the 66 faculty positions at junior rank of instructor or assistant professor, 32 (48%) were filled by NS and 34 (52%) by NNS candidates; of the 3 positions at senior rank of full or associate professor, all were filled by NNS faculty.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study have significant implications for foreign language education. The widespread practice of hiring faculty members who have degree specialities in literature but will teach primarily undergraduate language courses indicates an obvious problem hindering the quality of language programs. It suggests a tendancy for hiring and teaching assignments to be made according to the assumption, "If you can read it/speak it, you can teach it." This assumption is educationally unsound. Research on teacher effectiveness has just begun to identify attributes of effective teaching which extend far beyond the teacher's personal knowledge and skill in subject matter, indicating that effective teachers tend to spend maximum time-on-task, hold high but realistic expectations for their students, monitor student progress closely, provide challenging but not overwhelming problems for their students, and have good classroom management.[13] While these findings come primarily from studies on effective teaching of basic skills in elementary classrooms, the identified teacher behaviors and attitudes seem to be applicable for effective foreign language instruction as well. Perhaps prompted by these findings, foreign language educators have recently begun to call for studies focusing specifically on effective foreign language teaching behaviors. Peter Hornby recommends research addressing the use of language in the classroom, teaching strategies and techniques, and teacher attitudes and expectations.[14] Robert Politzer calls for research "identifying successful foreign language teaching in specific situations and with reference to specific objectives" studying teacher behaviors perceived by foreign language specialists as directly relevant to language teaching (e.g., verbal modeling, modeling using objects, error correction, etc.).[15] Certainly, the existing research indicates that language fluency in itself does not guarantee the ability to teach the target language effectively.

Recent articles concerning inservice programs for graduate teaching assistants assigned to undergraduate language courses suggest growing awareness by college and university foreign language departments of the need for personnel trained specifically to teach beginning and intermediate language acquisition courses, from which come later undergraduate majors and graduate students.[16] However, it seems that more far-reaching efforts to correct the present situation might be profitable. Perhaps in addition to offering training programs for graduate teaching assistants, the profession should develop inservice or summer programs in foreign language pedagogy designed especially for literature-specialist faculty members who teach undergraduate language acquisition courses. Further, it seems that foreign language graduate curricula, even for literature majors, should require coursework in language pedagogy, for as Hagiwara states, the profession should provide training programs that " . . . enable our students to meet the types of demands now being placed on them by many hiring departments . . . should prepare TA's for the career to which they aspire."[17] This study indicates that in order to do this, students intending to pursue university careers should be well prepared to teach undergraduate courses in language acquisition.

Although it is heartening that this study indicates a general picture of balanced hiring of NS versus NNS faculty, this finding must be interpreted cautiously, for the research assumptions underlying the method used to estimate the availability of NS and NNS candidates might be argued and the resulting estimated proportions of NS and NNS potential faculty questioned. It seems timely for the profession to develop a systematic method for determining the NS-NNS composition of university foreign language faculty and graduates. Further research is needed to test for bias in staffing patterns, and to determine if

foreign language departments are seeking balanced representation of NS-NNS faculty in order to provide students with the distinct advantages unique to teachers of each group.

For the same methodological considerations, and due to the complexity of the problem, and the small sample size used in this survey, the finding that more than one third small and large foreign language divisions appear to promote imbalance in NS or NNS faculty representation through new hirings must be considered a tentative finding. However, this does concur with the unfortunate impression held by many in the profession that individual foreign language divisions exhibit staffing preferences for either NS or NNS faculty. Phyllis Boring cites a colleague who theorizes that:

> Spanish and Russian are far more dominated by native speakers than French or German are. In French, however, native speakers who are by and large not "ethnic" but specially imported foreign professors, tend to be preferred at elite institutions where they largely dominate departments and tend to keep the encroachments of nonnatives to a minimum. There is also an important phenomenon of nonnatives who are insecure linguists and fear the incursions of native speakers, so foreign language departments tend to be largely either one or the other.[18]

Foreign language departments which educate specialists who are NNS but avoid hiring NNS faculty, or departments which discriminate against the very people whose native language and culture are considered important topics for specialized study, hold untenable positions. Furthermore, although hiring conditions are generally equal for NS and NNS candidates, the finding that higher faculty ranks tend to be "reserved" for NNS faculty merits further investigation.

Perhaps the remediation of questionable hiring and staffing practices identified in the present study may aid the profession to improve the quality of instruction, and reverse the pattern of declining enrollment, in part through modified staffing practices.

Footnotes

[1] This study was in part made possible by the NIE-NMSU Project on Minorities and Women's Research (NIE-G-7-0012). Sincere appreciation is extended to Luiza Amodeo, Guadalupe Valdes, and Gabriela Buchenau, New Mexico State University, for their comments and suggestions in preparing the manuscript.

[2] U.S., Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies, Strength Through Wisdom (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 8.

[3] See, for example, Beatrice S. Clark, "An Experiment with Ethnicity and Foreign Languages in a Black College," Foreign Language Annals, 5 (1980), 411-414; John W. Ferguson, "An Introductory Course That can Turn the Enrollment Tide," Foreign Language Annals, 4 (1980), 315-317; Otto W. Johnson, "Implementing the Intensive Model: An Experiment in German at the University of Florida," Foreign Language Annals, 2 (1980), 99-106.

[4] Examples of apparent bias are presented in an article by Phyllis Zatlin Boring, "Native Speakers, Ethnic Speakers, and Nonnatives: Is there a Pattern of Discrimination in the Profession?" ADFL Bulletin, 12 (1981), 25-28.

[5] For an interesting discussion on ethnography, see Leo Hickey, "Ethnography for Language Learners," Foreign Language Annals, 6 (1980), 475-481.

[6] For studies on role models see Albert Bandura, Psychological Modeling (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1971).

[7] The study does not explore preferences for ethnic or dialect subgroups found among native speakers and does not deal with the question of bilingualism. It was assumed that bilingual hirings would be classified as native speakers.

[8] The Chronicle of Higher Education appeared to provide a nationwide representative sample of available positions in French, German, and Spanish at the university level, advertised over a year-long period, more accessible to survey than the more numerous listings in the MLA Job List for the same period.

[9] "American Doctoral Degrees Granted in Foreign Languages, 1978-1979," Modern Language Journal, 64 (1980), 125-134; 141-145. While it was realized that the actual pool of applicants would not necessarily include all these individuals and would include as well other job-seekers, it was nevertheless assumed that the proportion of NS-NNS candidates would be the same.

[10] Six responses described positions that did not meet the criteria for the study for the following reasons: Two were for the rank of Adjunct Instructor, one originated in the College of Education, one was to begin in January 1981, one was primarily administrative, and one was for half-time employment.

[11] The number of responses containing the necessary information varied as follows for the statistical tests conducted: question 1, 61; question 2, 21 (French), 10 (German), and 30 (Spanish); question 3, 16 (smaller FL divisions) and 21 (larger divisions); question 4, 69.

[12] Disproportionate representation was defined as follows, based on estimated availability of NS/NNS qualified candidates: In language divisions with two to four faculty, the new hiring resulted in 75%-100% NS or NNS representations. In language divisions with five or more faculty, French division hiring of NS candidate produced less than 70% NNS or NNS hiring resulted in less than 15% NS; German division hiring resulted in less than 56% NNS or NNS hiring resulted in less than 24% NS representation; Spanish division NS hiring resulted in less than 43% NNS or NNS hiring resulted in less than 37% NS representation.

[13] Jere E. Brophy, "Teacher Behavior and Student Learning," Educational Leadership, 37 (1979), 33-38; and Jere E. Brophy, "Teacher Behavior and Its Effects," Journal of Educational Psychology, 71 (1979), 733-750.

[14] Peter A. Hornby, "Achieving Second Language Fluency Through Immersion Education," Foreign Language Annals, 2 (1980), 107-113.

[15] Robert L. Politzer, "Foreign Language Teaching and Bilingual Education: Research Implications," Foreign Language Annals, 4 (1980), p. 296.

[16] For example, see the article and bibliography by Jane Black Goepper and Marty Knorre, "Pre- and In-Service Training of Graduate Teaching Assistants," Modern Language Journal, 64 (1980), 446-450.

[17] Michio P. Hagiwara, "The Training of Graduate Teaching Assistants: Past, Present and Future," ADFL Bulletin, 7 (1976), p. 9.

[18] Op Cit., p. 26.